Mount Diablo Wildflowers: What’s in a Name?  
Ken Lavin

Spring is wildflower time on Mount Diablo. But a flower is more than just a pretty face. Many have interesting stories surrounding their common and scientific names, stories that often involve animals.

One of the earliest blooming flowers, the deep red Indian warrior,* belongs to the genus *Pedicularis*. *Pedicularis* is a type of loose. Legend had it that sheep and cattle grazing around these flowers were likely to become infested with lice. A close relative, Indian paintbrush, was the subject of an even stranger belief. Because the flower is often found in chaparral areas inhabited by reptiles, pioneers thought Indian paintbrush was pollinated by rattlesnakes! In fact, rattlesnakes were believed to get their venom from drinking paintbrush nectar. The truth is that this tube-shaped flower is pollinated by decidedly non-venomous hummingbirds.

The canine family is well represented among our wildflowers. There are many species of lupine on Mount Diablo, including the silver bush lupine. Lupine is derived from *Lupinus*, Latin for wolf. Because lupine sometimes grows in areas with few other plants, it was thought that lupine depletes the soil to the detriment of other species, like wolf predation thins a herd of cattle. But like the wolf, lupine’s beneficial role in ecology was misunderstood. Lupine is a pioneer plant, enriching barren soil with nitrogen-fixing nodules in its roots.

Indian warrior  
Photo: Mike Woodring

Baby blue eyes  
Photo: Leslie Contreras

Chinese houses  
Photo: Kevin Hintsa

Lupine  
Photo: Helene Cahill

Hound’s tongue derives its name not from the plant’s pretty blue flowers, but from its floppy leaves. According to the old English “doctrine of signatures,” a plant’s usefulness was related to what it looked like. Thus, a traveler could keep vicious dogs away by wrapping a hound’s tongue leaf around his shoe (thereby symbolically stepping on a dog’s tongue). This use was of doubtful effectiveness, as the crushed leaves of hound’s tongue were prescribed as a poultice for dog bites!

*The wildflowers mentioned here are further described and illustrated in the booklet Mount Diablo Wildflowers, published by the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association and available at the Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center and Summit Museum. A list of currently blooming wildflowers is posted at the Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center, open weekends. Visit www.mdia.org for a schedule of wildflower walks and hikes.
Park Superintendent’s Report
Roland Gaebert

Thank you for visiting Mount Diablo State Park. We take pride in making your state park a wonderful and unique experience for you. When President Kennedy said, “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,” he encouraged each citizen to contribute to the betterment of America. If you enjoy your parks and want to participate in maintaining the financial health of State Parks, then think about “what you can do for your parks” by becoming a volunteer or donating to a park.

One all-volunteer organization that has a direct link to Mount Diablo State Park is Mount Diablo Interpretive Association (MDIA), which supports the park by staffing the visitor centers, assisting maintenance, conducting interpretive field trips such as tarantula walks and botanical field tours, and much more.

For years, the park has had a severe shortage of funds to keep the infrastructure properly operating and maintain staff for maintenance and public safety. With the State’s budget woes, we are extremely grateful for park supporters: individuals, organizations, and corporate sponsors.

If you wish to become a park volunteer unaffiliated with an organization consider the Volunteer In Parks (VIP) Program. You report directly to park staff and assist in anything from repairing a sign, to patrolling the back country, to assisting visitors with their questions. If you have questions, call me at 925.673.2895 or email me at rgaebert@parks.ca.gov. You can make a difference in keeping Mount Diablo State Park a “jewel in the sky.”

MDIA President’s Column
Jim Mitchell

Many visitors to Mount Diablo State Park are unaware of the wide variety of interesting activities and sites that this park has to offer. Most visitors are focused on one destination, such as the 3,849-foot summit with its magnificent views, Rock City with its wind caves, or Mitchell Canyon for a hike and bird watching. Take the time to explore off the road to really get to know the park. Only by trying out a new trail or new entrance will you be able to discover what this mountain jewel has to offer.

Inside you will find a basic map outlining the major roads, sites, and trails in the park. But to get to know the less-populated back country areas of the park, Mount Diablo Interpretive Association (MDIA) offers the Trail Map of Mount Diablo State Park, sold at the entrance stations and visitor centers. Getting this map is the first step toward finding out what this park really has to offer. Then talk to one of our docents at the Summit or Mitchell Canyon visitor centers who will tell you about their favorite parts of the park and guide you to the best spots. Here you will also find books and brochures about the park and its natural history. Most of the money collected at the visitor centers gets invested directly back into this park.

Like many of California’s State Parks, this park is dependent not only on the dedication of the State Parks staff, but also on nonprofit organizations such as MDIA and the many volunteers who serve as docents, trail crew members, and hike leaders. MDIA is an all-volunteer organization made up of individuals who love Mount Diablo and give much of their time to protecting this valuable resource and making sure that you get the most out of your visit.

Summit Museum is open
7 days a week
10a.m. to 4p.m.
Summit temperature and wind conditions are updated every 20 minutes at 925.838.9225.

To submit articles or photographs for the Mount Diablo Review
email mdiamail@aol.com or leave a message at 925.927.7222
Submission deadline for the Fall/Winter issue is July 15.
Squirrel Encounter on the Mountain

For me, golden moments occur when stories that I present as a museum interpreter at Lindsay Wildlife Museum are witnessed in the wild. In the fall of 2010, on a warm, sunny day on the summit of Mount Diablo as I exited the front door of the Summit Museum, a wildlife moment occurred for me. This encounter involved a female ground squirrel that I had been observing for the past two years. She is a feisty little ground squirrel that has a burrow about twenty feet from the entrance and lives completely alone at the top of the mountain rather than in a colony. The nearest colony is five miles farther down the mountain. I named this little ground squirrel “Terra Too” after our ground squirrel at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum.

As I stood on the top of the steps leading to the entrance, little Terra came bounding up the steps. She stopped about halfway up the steps and commenced to jump up and down and make loud, excited chirps. Looking more closely, I spied a four-foot western rattlesnake stretched out full length sunning on the step. She immediately commenced to charge the snake until it coiled and began to shake its rattle in a threatening manner. This did not deter little Terra, and she charged the snake. The rattler struck at Terra and to my surprise Terra did a complete backward flip, making the snake’s strike miss. For fully five minutes, the snake struck at her, and Terra back-flipped away.

The snake’s recoil got slower and slower. Terra must have sensed this because on the next strike, instead of back-flipping away, she jumped over the strike and landed right in the middle of the coiled snake. Before the snake could recoil to strike, Terra gave the rattler a vicious bite. The rattler immediately exploded into action to escape, with Terra biting it from behind to hasten the snake’s retreat. The rattler slithered off the step and made a hasty retreat into a hole under the steps where it had its den. Little Terra jumped back on the steps, looked at me, and with a swish of her tail scampered off.

This was a golden moment for me to see the little ground squirrel perform an event that I had only read in books and previously described to visitors.

Mount Diablo Wildflowers: What’s in a Name? (continued from page 1)

One dog that definitely did not bite was Billy the terrier. Billy, along with his master, botanical explorer David Douglas, hiked the slopes of Mount Diablo in the early 1830s. Billy and Douglas discovered the Mount Diablo fairy lantern or globe tulip, a beautiful nodding yellow flower endemic to Mount Diablo. Billy also helped Douglas collect baby blue eyes and pagoda-shaped Chinese houses.

Buttercup, with its bright yellow color, is also called crow’s foot after the decidedly birdlike shape of its leaves. Buttercup’s scientific name is Ranunculus, or “little frog,” so named because the flower shares moist habitats with tree frogs.

Though the inland seas have been gone from the Mount Diablo area for 10 million years, one flower’s scientific name recalls this long-ago marine history. Larkspur is a Delphinium, so named because its streamlined shape is reminiscent of a dolphin. On Mount Diablo, look for both royal (purple) larkspur and scarlet larkspur.

Even the pesky feral pig has its own flower. The scientific name for blue-eyed grass is Sisyrinchium bellum, literally “pretty pig’s snout.” Contrary to its name, blue-eyed grass is neither blue nor a grass. This purple beauty is actually the smallest member of the iris family. Don’t tell the pigs.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that “the earth laughs in flowers.” As you enjoy the spring wildflowers on Mount Diablo, remember the humorous tales associated with our early bloomers.
Mount Diablo State Park

More detailed topographic trail maps are available for purchase at the entrance kiosks and the Summit and Mitchell Canyon Visitor Centers.

Mitchell Canyon Road does not offer a route to the Summit via motor vehicle - one must drive North Gate or South Gate Roads.

Park Fees per Car
- Mitchell Canyon Entrance: $6.00
- Macedo Park Entrance: $6.00
- North and South Gates: $10.00
  (minus $1 for Seniors 62+)
- Annual Park Pass: $125.00

Most land adjacent to the park is private property. Do not enter without the owner's permission.
Camping at Mount Diablo State Park

Mount Diablo has three designated family camping areas and five group camps.

**Juniper Campground** (36 sites, elevation 3,000 ft.) Located approximately 2 miles below the summit, on Summit Road, Juniper is known for its fantastic views. *Reservations available.*

**Live Oak Campground** (23 sites, elevation 1450 ft.) Located one mile above the South Gate Entrance Station, off South Gate Road. Live Oak is near Rock City, where one can explore rock formations. *Reservations available.*

**Junction Campground** (6 sites, elevation 2200 ft.) Located where South Gate and North Gate meet at the Ranger Station. This campground is situated in an open woodland area. *Available on a first-come, first-served basis ONLY.*

- All campgrounds are provided with picnic tables, fire pits or stoves, potable water and rest rooms.
- The campgrounds are mainly designed for tent camping, yet they can accommodate RVs up to 20 ft. in length. There are no hookups and no dumping stations provided in the Park.

**Camping Procedures**

You may make reservations from 48 hours to 7 months in advance by calling Reserve America at 800.444.7275 or by visiting their website at www.reserveamerica.com. Reservations can be made for a specific campground but not for a specific site. Campers will not be registered at Mitchell Canyon.

Check-in time is 2:00 p.m. Check-out time is 12:00 noon.

**Group Camps** are Buckeye, Barbecue Terrace, Wildcat, Stagecoach, and Boundary.

Reservations are available for all group camps with Reserve America. Each campground is primitive with running water and pit toilets. Barbecue Terrace is equipped with horse ties for equestrian use. Motorhomes are not allowed in the group camping areas. During the fire season (generally May to October) the park is subject to closure due to extreme fire danger. Campers must call the park at 925.837.2525 or 925.837.0904 one day prior to their arrival to confirm park status.

**General Rules**

- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- 8 people and 2 vehicles maximum per campsite.
- Each juvenile (under age of 18) must have written permission from his/her parents (with parent’s phone number) prior to camping without adult supervision. Phone verifications will be attempted.
- Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
- No electric generators from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Fires must be in stoves or fire pits provided. NO GROUND FIRES.
- Campfire restrictions are in effect during the fire season. Check fire conditions for appropriate use (see page 6).
- Campers are locked in the park overnight from sunset to 8:00 a.m. For emergencies dial 911.
- Peace and quiet – noise must not carry beyond your immediate camp or picnic ground.

**Group Picnic Reservations:** Call Ranger Scott Poole at 925.837.6129 x4

**Nightly Rates** $30 for Junction, Juniper and Live Oak Campground

Additional Vehicle (one only) $10; Senior Discount (62+) minus $2.00.
County Connection Buses Showcase
Mount Diablo  Keith Patterson

Have you seen Mount Diablo cruising by your neighborhood recently? The local County Connection bus company recently decorated their newest three buses with panoramic photos of Mount Diablo by applying vinyl wrap around the whole vehicle. The high-resolution images were taken by Mount Diablo’s best-known landscape photographer, Stephen Joseph, of Pleasant Hill.

“If we were going to make them different, we might as well make them very different,” said Mary Burdick, County Connection’s Marketing Manager. “We wanted them to reflect the local community.”

Stephen’s latest book, Mount Diablo, The Extraordinary Life and Landscapes of a California Treasure, contains 181 images of the mountain. The book, co-authored with Linda Rimac Colberg, was recently published by MDIA. To get your copy, use the order form on page 7 or stop by the Summit or Mitchell Canyon Visitor Centers.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE for obeying these and other park rules.

Ask a Park Ranger for further information.

- ALL FEATURES OF THE PARK ARE PROTECTED! Do not remove or disturb plants, animals, or geological features.
- PARK HOURS: Opens at 8 a.m. and closes at SUNSET. Visitors should be in their vehicles heading out at sunset to avoid being locked in.
- ALL ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES ARE PROHIBITED IN THE PARK.
- VEHICLES/BICYCLES SPEED LIMIT is 15-25 mph on park roads, 15 mph in campgrounds and picnic areas. All vehicles must stay on the pavement and are prohibited on trails and fire roads.
- BICYCLES ARE ALLOWED only on paved roads, fire roads and designated trails. Check at the Ranger Station for current regulations.
- SKATEBOARDS, ROLLERBLADES, ROLLER-SKATES, and GRAVITY-PROPELLED devices are prohibited.
- DOGS MUST BE ON LEASH at all times when out of your car; MUST BE IN TENT or vehicles at night; MUST STAY IN DEVELOPED AREAS – not allowed on trails or fire roads.
- FIRES: RESTRICTIONS IN EFFECT DURING SEASON – check with Ranger.
- FIRES MUST BE IN FIRE STOVES OR BARBECUES PROVIDED – no ground fires.
- EMERGENCIES: Dial 911.
- FIREWORKS PROHIBITED.
- FIREARMS/AIRGUNS PROHIBITED.
- HUNTING PROHIBITED.

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MDIA PRODUCT ORDER AND MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Thank you for your mail order!

If you would like to support MDIA, please consider joining
Mount Diablo Interpretive Association
Membership Application

Membership dues are deductible to the full extent allowed by law

- Student/Senior (55+) $15
- Individual $25
- Family $40
- Contributing $100
- Lifetime $500

Donation in addition to membership dues $______

Name: ____________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________

City/State/Zip: _________________________________

Telephone: (_____) _____________________________

Email: __________________________________________

Checks only, and made payable to “MDIA”.
Clip and mail to:
MDIA, PO Box 346, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346

Understanding Trail Signs

Over 400 trail signposts identify almost 187 miles of hiking trails in Mount Diablo State Park’s 20,000 acres.

The trail signs in the park follow the California State Parks uniform format. The name of the trail you are on is specified in relatively small horizontal type near the top of the sign.

The name that appears vertically in large type (usually another trail but sometimes a destination or park boundary) shows the termination of that particular trail; the word “TO”, in small letters, is important. The mileage to that end point is specified at the bottom.

Save Mount Diablo publishes an “Events Schedule” which includes hikes in Mount Diablo State Park. The schedule may be found online at www.savemountdiablo.org or via a link at www.mdia.org

MDIA’s newsletter is also available online via a link at www.mdia.org
Botanical Calendar
Helene Cahill

Milkmaids emerge in mid-January.
The first flowers of the New Year,
They bow their sleepy heads at first.
Unfurling into March, they nearly burst.

February’s Shooting Stars with fuchsia tails
Mingle with Indian Warriors and Indian Paintbrush
Festooning the shadiest and muddiest trails,
They color the Mountain’s hills and dales.

March’s Baby Blue Eyes and Blue Witch combine
With Hound’s Tongue, Blue Dicks, and Columbine.
They add to Diablo’s countenance a hue sublime,
Reflecting the heavens here in their brief time.

April’s Fool brings Lupine, Poppies, and Owl’s Clover
To the Mountain’s meadows and crags all over.
Wallflowers perch in valleys and the peaks,
While Pitcher Sage embellishes the creeks.

May the Clarkia and Fairy Lantern brings,
Cascading the canyons and the springs.

Mount Diablo Review

To Diablo’s trees, vales, knolls, and vistas, The Wild Cucumber and Wild Onion clings.
In June the Sticky Monkey Flowers appear,
The singular blossom here brings cheer.
Adorning with yellow the Hermit Robe
The Mountain wears the last half of the year.

July through September all have gone to seed.
The few dots of green that stay, all heed.
The Poison Oak and Miners Lettuce red,
Diablo palette’s colors have been shed.

October feeds the Mountain the wild grape.
Manzanita berries and acorns take shape.
By November, if rain from clouds escape,
Winter green steals across the landscape.

December Diablo dons a Druid cloak.
The seedlings sprout, the buds are woke.
The Manzanita, Ash, Buckeye and the Oak,
All prepare another year to eke.

Mount Diablo State Park Phone Numbers
Supervising Ranger  925.855.1730
Junction Ranger     925.837.6129
Mitchell Canyon Ranger  925.672.4266
Summit Museum       925.837.6119

Entrance Station  925.837.0904
Maintenance       925.837.6122
Sector Office     925.673.2891
General Information  925.837.2525
Summit Weather Conditions  925.838.9225

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